

Transport for Lancashire Committee

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Public Transport Issues and Opportunities Update

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Executive Summary

This report provides a short update with regard to the public transport issues and opportunities report considered by Members at their meeting on 1st December 2014. It is proposed that further consideration be given following the General Election and once any incoming Government's wider approach to devolution becomes clear.

Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note the contents of this report.

1. Background

- 1.1 At the previous meeting of Transport for Lancashire, members received a report setting out the public transport aspirations of the three local transport authorities within the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership area. Whilst recognising the benefits that a well-developed public transport network can bring, the report also highlighted a number of challenges facing local authorities, the greatest of which is the impact of a commercial market that has struggled in many areas and the impact of austerity, which severely reduces the ability of local authorities to step in and secure subsidised service provision. Members requested a further report outlining how improvements could be made with regard to public transport issues and opportunities, linked to the proposed Strategic Transport Prospectus.
- 1.2 As discussed under the previous agenda item, the purpose of the Strategic Transport Prospectus is to confirm why and how Lancashire has a key role to play in an interconnected 'Northern Powerhouse' and the highway and transport interventions needed for Lancashire to realise that role. From a public transport perspective, this inevitably focuses attention on the rail network. However, rail is only one part of the public transport system, and the suite of five highways and transport masterplans have helped to clarify the role of all forms of public transport in supporting economic growth and the wider aspirations of the three local transport authorities.
- 1.3 As reported previously, in light of the current financial pressures on local authorities the ability to continue subsidising bus service provision at current levels is becoming increasingly unsustainable, with some authorities having already announced that they are cutting all non-statutory elements of their

service provision. In February 2014, Lancashire County Council approved the undertaking of a full review of the subsidised local bus network. As part of this process, the County Council has developed a set of criteria against which to assess each subsidised bus service that go beyond financial performance to reflect the priorities set out in the Local Transport Plan, for example, journey purpose and how accessible a service is to the local community served.

- 1.4 Following consultation with stakeholders held over the summer of 2014, in December 2014, the County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport approved an amended set of criteria for assessing subsidised bus services. The criteria are attached as Appendix A. This approach is available for other local transport authorities to consider following, either individually or within the context of more formal joint working such as an integrated transport authority (ITA) or combined authority.
- 1.5 There are a number of options available where enhanced joint working between local transport authorities could assist with delivering better public transport services; these were set out in the previous report to Members. The Coalition Government's preferred approach to authorities seeking greater devolution of transport powers and funding is the combined authority model. However, given the impending General Election, it is not possible to foresee what the situation will be post May 7th. Further consideration will therefore need to take place within the wider context of any incoming Government's devolution agenda.